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THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN RUSSIA

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RUSSIA AND ISLAM: PAST AND PRESENT

editorial

Russia is home to more Muslims than any other European country except Turkey. Depending on how you count, there are up to 20 million Muslims in Russia, compared to 1.6 million in the United Kingdom, 3.2 million in Germany and 4 million in France. Unlike in Western Europe, these are not primarily recent immigrants: three quarters of Russia's Muslims hail from traditional Muslim regions such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan or Dagestan, some of which have been part of the Russian state for centuries. Most others have come from the former Soviet republics, mainly Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries, since 1991.

The Russians came into contact with Islam very early on. The year 988 not only saw the founding of what is now the world's oldest university, Al-Azhar in Cairo, but also the Christian baptism of Kievan Rus, the earliest precursor of the Russian state. But before opting for Christianity, Prince Vladimir I is said to have received Muslim and Jewish envoys in order to decide whether he should convert Rus to their religion instead. Ivan the Terrible's conquest of the Islamic Khanate of Kazan in 1552 is usually seen as the founding event of the Russian Empire. Early attempts to Christianise the Muslims of the Volga Region were largely unsuccessful, and over time they were integrated into Russia's social structure without having to abandon their religion. Later, the Empire used force and diplomacy to absorb more Islamic regions, including, in the 19th century, parts of the North Caucasus known today as Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Islam traditionally knows neither priests nor monks. The clergy is made up of scholars respected for their knowledge of the Koran, Islamic law and the tradition of the Prophet, but not seen as official representatives of a church. In Russia, however, the authorities made efforts to organise Islam hierarchically. These hierarchies were taken up in the Soviet Union, and the various Spiritual Boards continue to play an important political and cultural role today. This sometimes triggers intense counter-movements, such as the North Caucasian Wahhabites analysed in this issue of *kultura*. But in contrast to many Islamic countries and Western Europe, relatively few groups in Russia, with the partial exception of Chechnya and Dagestan, have attempted to use radical reinterpretations of Islam to gain social clout. The massive, often brutal Soviet secularisation has left its mark: today, Russia's Muslims are much closer, culturally speaking, to their non-Muslim compatriots than to fellow Muslims in Asia or Africa. Just like Orthodox Christians, they often perceive religious rituals as part of their cultural or ethnic background rather than as unbreakable rules of life. This has had an impact on the revival of Islamic culture in Russia, as different as this may have been in different regions. This issue of *kultura* charts the processes of Islamic renewal in the largest three traditionally Islamic regions.

A simplified transcription system has been adopted to render Islamic terms of Arabic origin, mostly omitting the ayn and the glottal stop. Plurals are usually based on the Arabic singular (i.e. madrasah – madrasah*s rather than* madaris*).*

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR:

Mischa Gabowitsch is a sociologist, translator and editor. His research focuses on reactions to extreme Russian nationalism since Perestroika. From 2003 until March 2006 he was editor-in-chief of the Moscow-based interdisciplinary journal *Neprikosnovenny Zapas*. The Einstein Forum in Potsdam has awarded him the Einstein Fellowship for 2007, the first ever presented, to work on attitudes towards the past in Russia and Germany.

THE CHANGING FACE OF ISLAM IN TATARSTAN

Irina Kuznetsova-Morenko, Leissan Salakhatdinova

ISLAM IN VOLGA BULGARIA, THE GOLDEN HORDE AND THE KAZAN KHANATE

Historically, the first state on the territory of what is now Tatarstan was Volga Bulgaria, founded in the late 9th and early 10th century by Turkic tribes. Bulgaria long remained the only advanced state in North-Eastern Europe. One of its corner-stones was Islam, proclaimed state religion in 922.

Bolgar, the former capital of Volga Bulgaria, is considered a holy site by local Muslims. In something like a ‘small *hajj*’, numerous pilgrims flock there on the major Islamic holidays to pray and visit the ruins of the Friday Mosque, the Small Minaret and the Black Chamber. There is a legend surrounding the source known as *Gabrakhman sahabe koyesy* in Bolgar. When Abd al-Rahman, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, heard that the daughter of the Bulgar Khan was ill, he hurried to help her. Healing water sprouted forth where he had struck the ground with his staff. The Khan’s daughter recovered, and the Khan and his entourage converted to Islam.

More and more people travel to Bolgar to experience the healing powers of this water every year, and it can now even be bought bottled. Whatever the truth of this legend, historical research suggests that Islam penetrated into Volga Bulgaria via the Central Asian trade routes. The new religion initiated the Bulgars to Arab-Islamic culture and fostered the development of science, philosophy and education. The Arabic alphabet replaced the Turkic runes and remained in place until the 1920s.

In the 13th century, Bulgaria became part of Genghis Khan’s empire and later fell to the Golden Horde. The rulers of the Horde were permissive towards the religions of the peoples they conquered, and so the young Islamic traditions of Bulgaria remained in place. The Kazan Khanate established in 1438 after the break-up of the Golden Horde further strengthened Islam. It was around this time that the Hanafite legal school became dominant. Bulgar religious scholars, the *ulema*, were trained at *madrasah*s across the Islamic world, above all in Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran. There is evidence that *mektebs* (schools) functioned at the mosques as early as the 10th century. *Madrasah*s or higher schools were established later. The head of the clergy, the most powerful person in the state bar the khan, was chosen from among the *sayyid*s, descendants of the first Caliph, Ali, and Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. The legal system was based on the *shariah*, illustrating the fusion between religion and politics in Bulgar society. The Muslim clergy (*mullahs*) were part of the feudal aristocracy, the *beys*.

ISLAM IN TSARIST RUSSIA

The fall of the Tatar state at the hands of Ivan the Terrible in 1552 was a turning point in the development of Islam. The conquest introduced a period of Christianisation. An official decree ordered the destruction of the mosques and prohibited the construction of new ones. Another ukase in the 17th century barred Muslim landowners from owning Christian serfs unless they converted to Christianity.

In 1713, Peter the Great issued a decree abolishing the privileges of the ‘Tatar vassals’. As a result, almost all *murza*s (nobles) and Tatar civil servants were sent to fell and transport timber for the Tsar’s shipyards. His daughter Elizabeth also pursued a harsh policy of Christianisation. She created a ‘Commission for the Newly Baptised’ that went round villages beating up, imprisoning and forcibly baptising peasants. The missionaries also staged pogroms. In Kazan, many local residents suffered, and 80% of mosques were destroyed.

At the time of the persecutions the Muslim communities had few links with each other. Islamic traditions were preserved by the *abyz*, people who knew how to read and interpret the Koran. The so-called 'popular' Islam that developed at that time tried to steer clear of the authorities and the officially appointed *mullah*s. This 'popular' islam was influenced by Naqshbandi Sufism, brought to the Volga region from Bukhara by *Sheikh* Feizkhan Kabuli (died 1802). Dagestani *ulema* and their Tatar disciples also played a significant role in preserving Islamic education. The renewal of Sufism in Tatarstan was the work of Muhammad bine Mussu al-Kadyki al-Shirwani (died after 1725).

The Christianisation campaign was unsuccessful. In 1719, there were 13,322 Tatars among the newly baptised inhabitants of the Volga region; over the following twelve years, only another 2,995 converted. The discrimination against Muslims led to insurrections and rebellions, such as the Batyrshi uprising. The Tatars actively participated in the rebellion led by Yemelyan Pugachev, who promised the Muslims land, freedom and religious liberty.

Catherine the Great legalised the Islamic clergy. In 1773, the Holy Synod issued a decree entitled 'On Religious Tolerance'; in 1788, the Muslims obtained a limited form of religious autonomy institutionalised in the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly. In 1800, the Tatar Muslims were allowed to print religious literature, and a Tatar printing press was set up in Kazan. Overall, about a hundred Islamic newspapers and maga-

Islam: Keywords I

The two biggest Islamic denominations are *Sunnism* and *Shiism*. Both are based on the Koran and the *Sunna* (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad. The Shiites, however, further believe that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and some of his descendants must be revered as divinely chosen successors to the Prophet. About 85% of the world's Muslims are Sunnis, and the rate is even higher in Russia, where Shiism is mainly limited to the Azeri community.

Islamic law, or *Shariah*, is the subject of jurisprudence or *Fiqh*. Every Sunni Muslim belongs to one of the four traditional legal schools (*madhhab*s), which differ in their interpretation of the law but mutually recognise each other.

The pragmatic *Hanafi* school is the most wide-spread, followed by the rather conservative *Maliki*, the moderate *Shafii* and the small, very strict *Hanbali* school. In Russia, the Shafii school is wide-spread in the North Caucasus and the Hanafi school is dominant everywhere else.

Sufism is generally seen as the mystical trend in Islam and often stands in opposition to the official clergy. There are both Sunni and Shiite Sufi *tariqahs* (Sufi orders). Unlike monks, the Sufis or dervishes are usually ordinary people from all walks of life who, in their spiritual quest, become disciples (*murid*s) to a spiritual leader (*sheikh*) and engage in a range of ritualised devotional acts (*dhikr*s) to reach greater closeness to God.

Sufism's grass-roots appeal and tolerance of the cult of saints that is scorned by dogmatic Islam has made it one of the main vehicles for the spread of Islam. The *Naqshbandi* and *Qadiri* orders are the most influential in the Muslim areas that are now part of Russia.

In the Caucasus, a local Sufi community is often referred to as *wird*. Some non-Muslim mystics in the West also call themselves Sufis.

zines were published across Russia. In 1836, Muslims were allowed to study at Kazan University.

In the 19th century, a reformist movement called jadidism (from the Arabic word for ‘new’) took shape in the region. Jadidism advocated a search for new interpretations of Islam and rejected strict scholasticism. Jadidism paid particular attention to secular instruction: it provided for both religious and secular subjects to be widely taught at *mekteb*s and *madrasah*s. It also encouraged women to take an active part in social and political life. In present-day theological debates and efforts to institutionalise Islam in the region, Tatar religious leaders and other public figures often turn to jadidist ideas.

Islam played a crucial role in popular education. Up to the end of the 19th century, the Tatars had two types of Islamic schools: primary schools called *mekteb*s and secondary schools known as *madrasah*s, both of which were funded by the local communities, both urban and rural. Thus, in 1912, Kazan province alone had 232 *madrasah*s and 1,067 *mekteb*s, with approximately 84,000 pupils overall. In 1897, 87% of Tatars could read and write their own language. By 1913, more books were printed in Tatar in the Russian Empire than in any other language except Russian.

The Islamic revival in post-Soviet Tatarstan

Two main factors contributed to the revival of Islam in the Republic of Tatarstan after perestroika: the emerging democracy and liberalism that allowed all confessions to develop freely, and the struggle for sovereignty. Movements and parties which wanted Tatarstan to become independent – above all the Tatar Public Centre (TPC) and *Ittifaq* (‘Concord’) – devoted particular attention to Islam. The TPC wanted to revive the noble traditions of jadidism. There was even a debate about moving the Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia and Siberia from Ufa to Kazan. ‘The independence of the state is the work of the nation; the independence of the nation resides in faith, in religion!’ was one of the earliest slogans of *Ittifaq*’s leader, Fauziya Bayramova.

This instrumental use of Islam as a means for the revival of Tatar culture meant that at the time, Islamic events were often staged in unconventional forms: stage readings of prayers or dramatised performances in the Central Stadium, in sports complexes or at Süyümbike Tower to mark the Islamic holidays. Thousands of people took part in

Women listening to a Koran-reading competition, amongst others the Chairwoman of the Union of Muslim Women of the Republic of Tatarstan, Almirahanum Adiatullina (Photo: www.e-islam.ru*)* these events. Demonstrators for Tatar independence wore green frontlets with crescent symbols. Nationalists consider Islam to be the core of Tatar national consciousness; for them, it is what enabled the Tatars to remain Tatars.

Numerous studies document an increase in Muslim believers in the republic. However, only a small proportion of them have adopted Islam as a way of life, implying five daily prayers, visits to the mosque and the observance of rites. Before perestroika, only a few elderly people turned to religion; nowadays some young people are also espousing an Islamic lifestyle. Thus 25% of young Tatars perform Islamic rites, though only one seventh of them (mainly in the countryside and small towns) strictly observe all the rules. Another 38% of young people identify with Islam but do not perform the Islamic rites; and 7% perform only those rites that are seen as having a social significance or being part of popular tradition.

Soviet propaganda long strove to extirpate Islamic traditions, like those of other religions; they were mainly preserved by the older generation, especially in the countryside. Old people passed the tradition on to their children in simplified form: as everyday rituals, short prayers and celebrations of Islamic holidays.

For marriages (*nikah*), naming ceremonies and funerals, it is common to invite the imam and recite prayers. Although comparatively few people fast during Ramadan, most Tatar families invite guests to celebrate the occasion and recite *surah*s from the Koran. This is considered a deed deserving spiritual credit (*sawab*), as is the offering of a sheep during the Sacrifice Feast (*Kurban*

TATARSTAN

Tatarstan on the Volga is the second-largest traditionally Muslim region in Russia in terms of population, following Bashkortostan. With its 3.8 million inhabitants, it is also the country's eighth-largest region. Its capital Kazan, known as a university town among other things in imperial Russia, is home to over one million people, making it one of Russia's ten largest cities. In 2005, the city celebrated its 1000th anniversary based on a recently revised version of its history.

Tatarstan has no foreign borders. Although part of the Russian Federation, in 1994–2000 it considered itself a sovereign republic confederated with Russia. The majority of the population are Tatars (about 53%), followed by Russians (about 39.5%).

Mintimer Shaimiev, formerly a Communist party boss in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, has been president of Tatarstan since 1991. A Tatar separatist movement was very active in the early 1990s but is now politically insignificant.

Russian and Tatar are the official languages of Tatarstan. Tatar is one of the major Turkic languages. It was mostly written using a form of the Arabic alphabet until 1927, with Latin letters until 1939 and in Cyrillic since then. Several versions of the Latin alphabet are now in use again, but attempts to make that the official usage were frustrated by a controversial federal language law in 2002. Apart from Tatarstan, Tatar is also widely spoken in neighbouring Bashkortostan and by Tatars across the former Soviet Union and in several adjacent regions.

Tatarstan has a highly developed economy and is one of Russia's main industrial centres. Besides car-making, Tatarstan has a large-scale chemical and petroleum industry since there are large oil and gas fields in the republic.

bayram).

However, young people often perceive Islamic rites as Tatar national traditions. Although around 80% of Tatars consider themselves religious, for most of them Islam boils down to visiting the mosque during Islamic holidays and performing the main rites. Belief in Allah does not prevent many of them from showing interest in horoscopes, magic and fortune-telling. Since the opening of the borders, Tatar Muslims have been able to perform the *hajj*: since 2001, 1,562 people have made the pilgrimage to the holy sites, and there are more every year.

At the onset of the Islamic revival, most Tatars knew little about the history and dogmas of Islam. TV and radio broadcasts, specialised Islamic periodicals and articles in the secular press began to cater to their need for information. Mosques offered instruction in the basics of Islam, and *madrasah*s opened, providing Islamic secondary and higher education, the first of them in 1990. By now, over a thousand *shakird*s (students) are studying at eight such institutions. However, young imams who were funded by Middle Eastern foundations to study at universities in the Arab world brought back alien traditions and a fundamentalist Islam that stood in contrast to jadidism, sometimes causing conflicts in the *ummah*. Today the Spiritual Board of Muslims is making efforts to provide students with basic religious training in Tatarstan before sending them abroad.

A Russian Islamic University was founded in 1998 to train imams and Islamic theologians. Its students come from across Russia and the CIS, and include women. Before Soviet rule, Tatar women were relatively well educated, despite the patriarchal structure of families. They not only studied at *madrasah*s but also received basic religious training at home, where they also learned to read and write. This was one of the main reasons why the intergenerational link was not severed during Soviet times: women would pass on their knowledge to their grandchildren.

Soviet monoculture placed severe limits on outward self-expression. Under the new-found freedom, religiously minded youth began to express their faith in their choice of clothing. While there is hardly any outward difference between religious young men and their non-religious contemporaries, you can immediately spot religious girls, who cover themselves with Islamic garb (*hijab*) from head to toe. They resemble Middle Eastern women more than pre-revolutionary Tatar women, who also wore headscarves and long dresses, but supplemented them with tight-fitting camisoles. Their scarves only covered their foreheads and were fastened at the back of the head; and some wore a Tatar head-dress called *kalfak*, a small cap embroidered with beads, which did not conceal their braids interlaced with strings of coins or pearls.

In the early 1990s, the new and unusual Islamic attire often drew attention and provoked incomprehension and aggression. By now people have become used to seeing girls in *hijab*s. Moreover, their garments have become more diverse: indicatively, a shop selling fashionable Islamic clothing recently opened in Kazan. Young people are trying to reconcile tradition with modern trends. The Tatar women's magazine *Süyümbike* reports on the latest in Islamic fashion.

Islam in Art and Architecture

The national and religious revival in Tatarstan triggered an interest in the Islamic cultural heritage: Oriental motifs appeared in architecture, painters began using Arabic calligraphy and ornamental drawings, and some turned to the Middle Eastern art of miniature painting. An International Festival of Islamic Cinema called *Golden Minbar* first took place in Kazan in 2005.

As outward symbols of the Islamic renaissance, the minarets of newly built mosques rose up in towns and villages across the republic; thousands of half-destroyed mosques were restored. There were only four mosques in the whole of Tatarstan at the dawn of perestroika; now there are over a thousand. Most of them, especially in the countryside, follow a rather simple design: they copy the traditional (often wooden) Tatar mosques, with a single minaret on top of the roof or above the entrance. This simplicity is due to their hurried construction and the lack of architects specialising in religious buildings. However, mosques of a new type have been appearing in large cities: they feature Tatar motifs – tulip-shaped windows at the base of the cupola and small minarets protruding from the main part of the building, but do not follow historic designs. Although urban architecture in Tatarstan differs little from that of Russia as a whole, the new mosques in the city centres add Oriental traits to the cityscape.

One of the most striking examples of a contemporary mosque that takes up Tatar traditions is the Kul-Sharif Mosque in the very centre of Kazan, inside the Kremlin. The 16th century diplomat, scholar and poet Kul-Sharif headed a mosque that was also a centre of religious education; he died when spearheading the defence of this part of the town during the Russian conquest of Kazan in 1552, and the mosque was ravaged and burned down. The shape of the mosque is said to have influenced the design of Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, built to commemorate the seizure of Kazan.

The opening ceremony of the new Qol-Sharif mosque, currently the biggest in Europe, took place in 2005. During prayers, its huge prayer hall offers space for one thousand people. Apart from the mosque, the complex also includes a museum

ISLAM: KEYWORDS II

In Islam, there is neither a clergy in the Christian sense of the term, nor monasticism. The highly educated theological scholars known as *ulema* (singular: *alim*) play an important role. The term is sometimes taken to include other men who carry out certain religious functions, including *muftis* or legal scholars who have the authority to issue a *fatwah* (legal pronouncement), or *qadis* (judges).

There is an important distinction between *muftis* and *muftiates*, the latter being another term for the *spiritual boards* created by the Russian/Soviet authorities to oversee Islamic matters. In Shia Islam, highly revered scholars are honoured with the title of *ayatollah*, and a handful of them become *grand ayatollah*s.

The *imam* leads the prayer in the *mosque*, including the larger communal or *Friday mosque*, and may hold a sermon from the *minbar* or pulpit for members of his *jamaat* (community or congregation). Since in Shia Islam the word 'imam' is reserved for divinely ordained leaders of the entire *ummah* (community of all Muslims), there the prayer leaders are called *mullah*s, a term that is also used by Sunnis in Russia. They also perform other functions, e.g. at marriages (*nikah*) or funerals (*dafn*).

The word *sheikh* (literally, 'man of old age') has different meanings and may simply denote a formally trained scholar. In Sufism, a *sheikh* is a spiritual leader.

The word *emir* also has more than one meaning: it is used to refer to princes, military commanders or the Caliph as ruler of all Muslims. In the North Caucasus the term also designates leaders of some Islamic communities.

Sayyid, literally 'master', is a title given to all descendants of the Prophet via the male line.

and educational centre. It has eight minarets, the same number the 16th century Kul-Sharif mosque is said to have had. The patterns used to decorate the cupola are reminiscent of the 'Kazan cap', the crown of the Kazan khans, which was taken to Moscow after the fall of Kazan and is now on display in the Armory Museum in Moscow. Besides state funds, construction of the mosque was also financed by donations from 600 companies and over 35,000 individuals.

Another building in the Kazan Kremlin that is decorated with an Islamic crescent is the Süyümbike Tower, the city's architectural symbol. In 1918, the Council of People's Commissars handed it over 'to the toiling Muslims for eternal use' and decorated it with a silver-plated crescent; with the onset of militant atheism in 1934, the crescent was torn down. A new gilded crescent was placed at the top of the tower in 1993, and since then has been used as a minaret for the prayer commemorating the victims of 1552.

Culture and Politics

Ideologically, Islam in Tatarstan is rather heterogeneous: most Muslims (above all the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Tatarstan) uphold a traditional, moderate form of Islam; but there are also fundamentalist communities, whose leaders mostly studied in Egypt, Kuwait or Iran in the early and mid-1990s. Rafael Khakimov, the president's political advisor, has taken up the ideas of jadidism to develop a 'reformist' Islam that combines faith with the values of modern society. With his conception of 'Euro-Islam', Khakimov calls for an Islam stripped of rites and rituals and adapted to modernity.

These disagreements have not led to open conflict, because both the government and the Spiritual Board of Muslims acknowledge the need to preserve Kazan's status as the spiritual centre of the Tatars. Tatarstan cultivates an exclusively secular image. Nevertheless, federal legislation allows the authorities to supervise religious institutions, and official figures attend Islamic congresses, using them as informal sounding boards on issues of importance to the Muslim community. In 2005, the World Congress of Tatars based in Tatarstan organised a meeting between the two main rival Muslim leaders of Russia: Ravil Gaynutdin, who heads the Russian Council of Muftis, and Talgat Tadzhuddin, the mufti of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia. Raising Kazan's profile as a platform for intra-Islamic dialogue is intended to strengthen its position in the Muslim world.

Translated from the Russian
by Mischa Gabowitsch

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Reading Suggestions:

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MUSLIMS IN THE URALS: RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN BASHKORTOSTAN

Xavier Le Torrivelec

A Muslim press appeared in Russia after the 1905 revolution, allowing the jadidist reformers in Ufa and Kazan to express their thirst for modernity freely. The content of the demands to be put forward by the Muslim deputies in the new Duma was hotly debated. However, the discussions focused on a seemingly harmless issue: the hour of the evening prayer. Several imams from Tomsk had publicly raised the question of how to perform five daily prayers in Russia's northern regions, where the sun does not set for weeks.

Muslims in the Volga-Ural region are still facing the issue of how to adopt Islam to local conditions. There is rivalry between the old village imams, who represent a traditional yet fast-disappearing form of Islam, and their younger, foreign-trained colleagues, who advocate a more intellectual type of Islam as the core of a new identity.

Abutting the foothills of the Southern Urals, Bashkortostan, with its four million inhabitants, is a sovereign republic that is part of the Russian Federation. A majority of urban dwellers, and 40% of the overall population, are Russians. Situated 1,500 km from Moscow, this region is, however, a centre of Sunni Islam because of its large Turkic-speaking Tatar and Bashkir population. The region was Islamicised in the 14th century, when one of the oldest Muslim states, the powerful Volga Bulgar Khanate, subjugated the nomadic tribes of the Urals.

After the Russian conquest and the failure of Peter the Great's Christianisation campaigns, Catherine the Great recognised the Muslims as fully fledged subjects of the Russian Empire. With the onset of Communist ideocracy and the physical elimination of the old Muslim elite, religion was banned from public space, reduced to being a mere private matter. This didn't preclude the private practice of religion, yet the Soviet period was primarily marked by an accelerated secularisation. The end of the USSR therefore appeared as God's revenge: religion acquired a new public profile, manifested in a broad consensus on the existence of God, cultural adherence to the ancestral creed and a renewed confidence in the clergy.

The most obvious sign of what many described as a 'return' of religion was the appearance of mosques in the towns and villages of Bashkortostan. There are currently 792 functioning mosques in the republic, as opposed to 20 in 1986. There are also about ten *madrasah*s (Koranic schools) where there were none under Soviet rule. Of the hundred or so young graduates of a course of Koranic studies in Sterlitamak (the old capital) or Ufa (the new one), about twenty continue their studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and another ten or so are appointed imams in villages across the region.

This process of renewal has profited from large-scale foreign assistance, especially from Saudi Arabia, and was accompanied by a revival of ostentatious religious practices. In Tatar and Bashkir villages, mosque construction has usually been financed by a local entrepreneur in search of social recognition, or by the director of the nearby kolkhoz. Friday prayers at the mosques are not heavily frequented (about ten people in a village of 300), but the old self-proclaimed mullahs can now perform religious rites in plain daylight without fear of disturbance. In the village, the Ramadan fast is mainly observed by elderly people, but everyone takes part in the Muslim feasts (*Kurban bayram* and *Uraza bayram*), which are celebrated every year with the help of the local administration.

In the cities, and especially among the intelligentsia, religious life is less intense than in the villages, although Muslim urban dwellers tend to have a more profound and conscious religious culture than is usual in the Orthodox world. If Islam has never been the foundation of urban life, it has never disappeared from everyday existence in the cities either. Especially among Tatar and Bashkir families who moved to the cities in the 1970s, circumcisions used to take place clandestinely and are now becoming more and more ostentatious events, and an imam is present at marriages and funerals.

It is difficult, however, to distinguish between the religious and ethno-national aspects of this Islamic renewal. Especially among Tatars in Bashkortostan, Islam remains a decisive factor of communal identity. They perceive religious holidays as elements of their national culture, and one of the peculiar traits of their collective identity is the correlation between their national and religious self-definitions. The political antagonism between Tatar and Bashkir nationalists has found a religious expression: the Bashkirs are usually considered more Muslim than the Tatars, who settled earlier and have a longer history of collaboration with the Russians.

This ethnic factor has played a not unimportent role in dividing the clerical elite of Bashkortostan. The Spiritual Board of Muslims (SBMES), the central Muslim governing body that was based in Ufa during the Soviet period, started to break up into regional directorates in 1992. A separate Bashkir administrative structure, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan (SBMRB), was established, headed by Nurmukhamet Nigmatullin. The SBMES was renamed the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia and the European countries of the CIS (CSBRE). It is still directed by a Tatar leader,

BASHKORTOSTAN

The Republic of Bashkortostan, also known as Bashkiria, is located in, and west of, the South Urals. It does not border any foreign countries. With over four million inhabitants, it is Russia's seventh most populous region, and the largest with a traditionally Muslim majority. According to the 2002 census, its capital Ufa is Russia's eleventh-biggest city, and the smallest with a population of over one million.

Until well into the 19th century many Bashkirs were nomads. They represent less than 30% of the population of Bashkortostan, less than the Russians (40%) and only slightly more than the Tatars (about 24%, which some Tatars think is an underestimation).

While Bashkir is the only official language apart from Russian, it is less wide-spread than Tatar, which is also spoken by many Bashkirs. The two languages are closely related, and just like Tatar, Bashkir was written with Arabic letters until 1927, with Latin until 1939, and with Cyrillic letters since then.

Bashkiria is one of Russia's most resource-rich areas. It saw swift industrial development during the Second World War, when many factories were moved here from the western part of the country.

A petroleum engineer by training, Murtaza Rakhimov has been at the helm of Bashkortostan since 1990, becoming President of the Republic in 1993. The republic's political system is widely considered to be one of the most corrupt and repressive in the whole of Russia. In December 2004, hundreds of people were beaten up in the town of Blagoveshchensk by police and special forces units in a wanton act of vengeance after a brawl. Despite the nationwide media outcry, no significant political changes have occurred in Bashkortostan since then.

Talgat Tadjuddin, who has been in charge since 1980.

The absence of religious elites capable of leading a coherent Islamic revival movement is undeniable, exacerbating the internal splits. In Bashkortostan, more than half of the imams are over 60 years old, and 60% of them have never had any formal religious training. The current imams have a very low level of religious knowledge, sometimes spreading ideas that run counter to the norms of Islam and drive away believers in search of an intellectualised interpretation of their faith. This has led to a number of inter-generational conflicts. The old generation is harbouring resentment against the young, better-trained imams who are trying to take their place, and is unwilling to modify the practices that have ensured the survival of Islam in the decades of official atheism even if they conflict with the letter of the shariah, of which Muslim believers still have little grasp anyway. This is why, before a government clampdown, extremist groups well entrenched in certain economically declining regions (such as Neftekamsk in Bashkortostan) were able to attract scores of unemployed youth with their talk of breaking with the practices of the older generations.

Finally, like the rest of Europe, Bashkortostan is witnessing a profound transformation of religious belief. Faith is now an expression of personal conviction rather than dominant custom. The individualisation of faith signifies a privatisation of religion and, ultimately, the success of the modern emancipatory project. Northern Eurasian Islam is thus perfectly integrated, and while the religion has been present in the region for a long time, this does not suffice to create a strong rift between Turkic and Russian groups.

The new mosque of Sterlitamak, the first capital of Bashkortostan, August 2006
Photo: Xavier Le Torrivellec

СОБОРНАЯ МЕЧЕТЬ
ЗАО СМП-185 25-52-35
ДИРЕКТОР
ООО СТЕРЛИТАМАК-1 ВНЗМ
ДИРЕКТОР 43-30-98
РЕЛИГИОЗНАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ г. СТЕРЛИТАМАКА
25-15-40

portrait

Today, the uncontested status of Islam – recognised in 1997 as a ‘traditional religion’ along with Orthodoxy, Buddhism and Judaism – guarantees the peaceful co-existence of diverse religions within Russian society. Ignoring this history, however, many Western observers view Islam in Russia exclusively through the prism of the Caucasian conflict. Perhaps the time has come to acknowledge that Russia, the European country with the largest Muslim population, is an example to be followed, at least where inter-confessional relations in Bashkortostan are concerned.

Translated from the French
by Mischa Gabowitsch

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RELIGIOUS CULTURE IN DAGESTAN: FROM SOCIALIST TO ISLAMIC REVOLUTION?

analysis

Vladimir Bobrovnikov

In the Caucasus, Dagestan has a reputation as a religious centre. The history of this narrow strip of barren land squeezed between the Caspian Sea and the Greater Caucasus has been full of devastating wars and invasions. Nevertheless, the “country of mountains”, as its name translates, was long renowned for its scholars (*ulema*), its Koranic schools (*madrasahs*) and manuscript libraries, over 400 of which have survived to this day in mosques and private collections. For a wide range of authors, Dagestan used to be associated above all with Islamic culture. In the 17th–18th century Middle East it was called the ‘sea of learning’ (*bahr al-ulum*). According to the Soviet historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, ‘there were probably more educated people on this heap of naked cliffs than anywhere else in the Caucasus’. His contemporary Nazhmutdin Samursky, the first Soviet leader of Dagestan, considered ‘religious fanaticism’ (meaning adherence to Islamic culture) one of the three pillars of pre-revolutionary highlander society, the other two being the clan structure and land scarcity.

Today, once again, views on Islam are changing. What Samursky called a ‘religious narcotic’ is once again being exalted as ‘glorious highlander traditions’. The Muslim clerical elite has recovered and even expanded its influence on Dagestani society and is trying to revive religious culture, outlawed in the USSR. They enjoy the support of former Communist Party officials who have retained their leading positions in the republic’s government. Islam has once again become a political trump card, and every politician hastens to assure believers that he loves and protects it. This is illustrated in a typical statement by the first president of Dagestan, Mukhu Aliev: ‘Without religion our history wouldn’t exist, and we will support our traditional religious currents… and for this purpose we shall strengthen the Spiritual Board of Muslims…’

An Islamic Cultural Revolution?

Leaving politics aside, what is the practical effect of such appeals? At first glance the Islamic comeback may seem to have made a clean sweep of 70 years of secularism. The figures are more than eloquent. The Soviet authorities struggled for 20–30 years to replace the mosque-based Koranic primary schools (*mektebs*) and colleges (*madrasahs*) with a secular school system in Russian and the local languages. It was only in the 1960s that the cultural revolution produced its first results. But even then (in 1959–60) the republic merely had 199 secondary schools, 27 specialised and technical schools and only four institutions of higher education (all in the capital, Makhachkala). The Islamic school system has been far more successful over a period of just 10 or 15 years. From 1988 to 1996, 670 mektebs were created (compared to 398 Soviet primary schools in 1927), as well as 25 madrasahs and 13 Islamic universities, with branches in rural areas. Tuition in Arabic and the basics of Islam was offered everywhere, similar to the early Soviet campaign against illiteracy. Today, 15,000 people are taught in Islamic education institutions, and over 33,000 more are covered by the system of informal Sufi education.

Contemporary Islamic schools have profited from a striking amount of private funding. In early Soviet times, a vast proportion of the funds allocated to Dagestan from Moscow were spent on developing popular schooling (7,581,400 roubles, or 34.4% of the republic’s budget, in the 1929–30 school year alone). The rise of the Islamic schools, however, has been due to private donations (*sadaqah*), primarily by ‘New Dagestani’ businessmen such as the head of Makhachkala’s port, Muhammad Kharkharov, or the city’s mayor, Said Amirov. The schools are also funded by rent proceeds and small business donations. In earlier times, Islamic education was mainly based on *waqf*s. This is what Islamic law calls property donated for charitable and religious purposes. *Waqf*s were bound to specific communities (*jama’at*s); in Dagestan they served as a means for the creation of mosque libraries. In 1927 they lost their legal status in the course of nationalisation and were soon plundered. The few *waqf*s that were de facto restored in the 1990s are insubstantial and can no longer serve as a support for Islamic culture and schooling.

Spiritual Elite

The task of the Islamic ‘cultural revolution’ is to restore the Islamic spiritual elite, thinned out by Soviet repressions. Islam knows no church or formal clergy, and so membership of that elite is traditionally determined by the *jama’at*’s choice, the candidate’s training and his knowledge of the Arabic religious tradition. Apart from the judges (*qadi*s), mullahs or imams, and the *muezzins* who lead the prayer call, it also includes *madrasah* teachers and the senior students who assist them. Graduates of *madrasah*s and Islamic universities are trained in three main fields: they become Koran reciters (*qari’*), imams at mosques, or, with more training, Islamic scholars (*ulema*). In any time and place there have always been few *ulema*. While there are no precise figures, in 1926, up to 10% of Dagestanis were included in that category in the first Soviet census, encompassing all those who had gone through the local religious training. Today the figure is much lower, no more than 2–3,000 (0.1%).

SUNNIS AND SHIITES

The republic's great ethno-confessional variety is another important factor. The Muslims of Dagestan belong to a range of currents and sects, which have been ethnically coloured since the 20th century. Most of them are Sunni and follow the traditional Shafii legal school (*madhhab*), as do the neighbouring Chechens and Ingush. The Nogais in northern Dagestan are Hanafites, like most other Muslims in Russia. In the south of the republic there are – mainly Azeri – Twelver Shiites (2.8% of the overall population). Twenty Shiite congregations are registered here. Outside Derbent there are Shiite mosques in Makhachkala and in Kizlyar in the north. The bloody clashes between Shiites and Sunnis in the early 20th century are now forgotten. In the Shiite Friday mosque of Derbent they even pray in the same hall, although this is partitioned into two sections. This testifies to the assimilation of Shiite religious culture in a Sunni environment. Some Shiite rites, such as the processions of self-flagellating mourners (*shakhsey-vakhsey*) to commemorate the death of the second Shiite imam, Hussain ibn Ali, are performed differently by Dagestanis than by their fellow Shiites in Azerbaijan and Iran.

From 1987 to 2006, the number of *jama'at*s in Dagestan jumped from 27 to 1,820. Over half of them (1,091) now have their own Friday mosques. The total number of mosques has gone up to 1,679, close to pre-revolutionary figures (1915: 2021 mosques and 354 Friday mosques). These figures are the highest in the entire Caucasus. Far fewer mosques and prayer houses have been opened in the region's other 'Islamic republics'. But there are still not enough. As in Soviet times, over four fifths of the mosques are concentrated in central and northern Dagestan. In the south, holy sites (called *ziyarat* in Arabic and *pir* in Persian) often serve as Friday mosques. Over the post-Soviet period, the number of such holy sites has grown from 127 to 839. Over three quarters of the functioning *ziyarat* of the North Caucasus are in Dagestan. Dagestan is also the only republic in the Russian Caucasus along with Chechnya and Ingushetia where Sufi communities (*wird*s) have openly resumed their activities in the 1990s.

SUFIS AND HOLY SITES

Sixteen Sufi *sheikh*s are currently active in Dagestan. They belong to three orders that appeared in the region at the time of the Russian conquest: the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, the Shaziliyya and the Qadiriyya, the latter being more widespread in Chechnya and Ingushetia. These orders are not ethnically coloured. The Dagestani *wird*s include people from different ethnic backgrounds: Avars, Kumyks, Tabassarans, Dargins and even some Russian converts to Islam. One of the peculiar features of post-Soviet Sufism in the East Caucasus has been the emergence of *wird*s around the tombs of well-known 19th–20th century Sufis without there being a living *sheikh* to guide them. One such community exists in the village

ISLAM: KEYWORDS III

The *five pillars* of Islam are the profession of faith (*shahadah*), the obligation to perform the prayer (*salat*) five times a day, to give alms (*zakat*) to the needy, to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) once in a lifetime and to *fast* during the month of *Ramadan*.

This fast is broken during the holiday of *Eid ul-Fitr*, known in the Turkic languages spoken in Russia as *Uraza bayram*. It is the second most important Islamic holiday after *Eid ul-Adha*, the Sacrifice Feast called *Kurban bayram* in Tatar. This marks the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca.

of Akusha, once home to Sheikh Ali-Hajji, who died in 1930 at the hands of the Soviet authorities. Sufi practices such as the collective *dhikr* meditations therefore blend in with the worship of holy places.

Journalists and, following them, some academics tend to overestimate the significance of Sufism in post-Soviet Dagestani society. In fact the influence of most Sufi *sheikh*s is limited to their small congregations, where they perform functions similar to those of a mullah. Many respected *sheikh*s, such as the Naqshbandi Ilyas-Hajji Ilyasov or Mukhammed-Mukhtar Babatov, head district *jama'at*s on the outskirts of Makhachkala. At the same time many *madrasah*s and 14 out of the republic's 16 Islamic universities are under the influence of Naqshbandi-Shazili teachings. Sufi ethics are part of their curricula. The two most influential Sufis in Dagestan are Said-*Efendi* from Chirkey in the North and Serazhutdin from Khurik in the southern region of Tabassaran. The *murid*s (disciples) of Said-*Efendi* are in control of the Makhachkala muftiate, which regularly organises *Hajj* pilgrimages from Dagestan.

MANAGED ISLAM

The history of the Dagestani muftiate deserves separate treatment. The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Dagestan (SBMD) emerged in January 1990 from the ruins of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the North Caucasus (SBMNC), created in 1944 after Islam was officially recognised in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union presented the muftiate as an independent organisation, but in fact it was an official Soviet institution, or rather an Islamic tradition invented by the state. One should distinguish between the *mufti*s, the highest authorities on the *sharia*, who emerged in the first Arab caliphates, and the *muftiate*s, institutions of state power which go back to the age of empires. The latter were created in the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, by non-Muslim central authorities from Catherine the Great to Alexander II, to ensure control over Russia's Muslims. They were revived by Stalin at the end of the Second World War. The SBMNC not only acted as a religious court, collected alms (*zakat*) and issued *fatwah*s (expert opinions on *shariah* law), but also registered mosques and imams, helped the state in its fight against illegal Koranic study groups (*hujra*) and took part in the USSR's struggle against the capitalist world.

While the SBMNC oversaw Islamic culture, it did not maintain an Islamic educational system of its own. This was the privilege of the Central Asian muftiate (CASBM), responsible for the Mir-i-Arab *madrasah* in Bukhara and the Tashkent Islamic Institute. Until 1991 these were the only educational institutions in the Soviet Union that officially trained *ulema*, including the administrators of the various Spiritual Boards. Several SBMNC officials graduated from them, as did certain Dagestani imams and even contemporary Sufis, including the last mufti (in 1978–1989), Makhmud Gekkiev, and the Naqshbandi *sheikh* Ilyas Ilyasov. The new Dagestani Spiritual Board has significantly more power than its predecessor. Freed from rigid state control, the muftiate has created several Islamic institutions of higher education in Dagestan, including the Saypula-Qadi Islamic University in Buynaksk whose rector is the chairman of the ulema council of the SBMD, the Shazili *sheikh* Arslan-Ali Gamzatov. The SBMD also publishes its own newspapers, *Peace* and *Light of Islam*, and maintains web sites (www.islam.ru, sufism.chat.ru). Twice a week it broadcasts a TV show called *Peace Be Upon You*.

THE SOVIET HERITAGE

The Soviet roots of the Islamic 'cultural revolution' are evident in the policies of the SBMD, which is trying to exercise control over local

Friday mosques via *ulema* councils (*shura*) in each district. The Soviet heritage also shows in the muftiate's unofficial ties with the government of Dagestan and, much more importantly, in the contemporary Islamic education system. Although institutions of higher Islamic learning only emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Soviet influence is obvious. The names, curricula, teaching methods and course lengths in the 16 Islamic universities and their 52 branches are modelled on those of the secular school system created in the region during the Soviet cultural revolution. Subjects from the secular curriculum featured in the Islamic syllabus include Russian and English, Russian history, ecology, computer science, law and politics, the foundations of international relations and pedagogy. On the other hand, the syllabus includes disciplines traditionally taught at *madrasah*s, such as Koranic exegesis (*tafsir*), the tradition of the Prophet (*hadith*) and Sufi ethics (*suluk*).

This blend between a Soviet and a Muslim school has so far failed to produce anything viable. The quality of education at Islamic universities is lower than at state universities or even at the pre-revolutionary *madrasah*s which were irrevocably destroyed in the 1920s and 30s. Amri Shikhsaidov, *the* local authority in Islamic studies, considers the Islamic universities of Dagestan to be a mere 'shadow' of the famous Dagestani

DAGESTAN

Dagestan is located on the Caspian Sea in the Eastern part of the North Caucasus, bordering on Azerbaijan and Georgia and the Russian regions of Chechnya, Kalmykia and Stavropol. It is Russia's poorest region and one of the least safe: politically motivated gun battles and acts of terror are not uncommon.

Although it only has just over 2.5 million inhabitants, the Republic of Dagestan is Europe's most ethnically diverse area. It is home to several dozen ethnic groups, who speak languages belonging to several unrelated families. The Avars, Dargins, Kumyks and Lezgins are, in that order, the largest groups.

This diversity has been fostered by the comparative isolation of many of the country's mountainous regions. Over the past decades, however, many former highlanders have moved to the plains in Dagestan and surrounding areas.

The capital Makhachkala on the Caspian shore (approx. 460,000 inhabitants) was founded as a Russian fortress called Petrovskoe in the 19th century. The southern city of Derbent is the oldest town located on Russian territory.

Russian is used as the main *lingua franca*, but many Dagestanis also speak Avar. Since Dagestan firmly belonged to Near Eastern Islamic world until at least the 19th century, Arabic, Turkish and Persian were also in use then.

The republic's political system is characterised by ethnic solidarity and especially clan and family structures. From the early 1990s onwards a sophisticated system of ethnic representation guaranteed relative stability. Until the beginning of this year, the Dargin Magomedali Magomedov was Chairman of the State Council, then the highest post in the republic. In February 2006, this post was abolished on Vladimir Putin's request, and the Dagestani parliament endorsed Putin's nominee for the newly created presidency, the Avar Mukhu Aliev.

*madrasah*s of the 18th and 19th centuries. On the whole, the comeback of Islam has not led to a revival of the advanced culture of past generations, nor has it ensured order and prosperity. Quantity has failed to breed quality. The rapid increase in the number of mosques, *madrasah*s and other Islamic institutions has not changed Dagestani society for the better.

The hopes for an Islamic rebirth have been shattered in all the Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union. There is a general lack of educated imams, teachers and *qadi*s (judges). Crime levels, rather than religious culture, have risen sharply, especially in the Russian Caucasus. Dagestan is now one of the most insecure regions in the world.

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the influx of Middle Eastern missionaries and funds into Dagestan in the 1990s failed to improve the situation, despite the fact that the number of pilgrimages to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia has grown sharply: from 345 in 1990, the number of *hajji*s grew to 13,268 in 1998. From 2000 onwards, however, their numbers started to decline (5,449 in 2000), although this figure outweighs those for other parts of Russia. Islamic 'knowledge centres' and schools funded by international missionary foundations (the Salvation, SAAR, Ibrahim al-Hairiyya and other foundations) were active in Dagestan throughout the 1990s. Several thousand Dagestanis received an Islamic education at *madrasah*s and Islamic universities in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and other Muslim countries in the Middle East, including the famous Al-Azhar in Cairo and Ez-Zitouna in Tunis. But the proficiency of most Dagestani students abroad remains low. Many of them abandon their studies and return home or find work in the tourist industry catering to Russian speakers.

SOCIAL CHANGE

So what is wrong? Why is Dagestan's Islamic culture still on the decline? Its difficulties are probably due to the social and cultural transformations of the 20th century. Dagestan today is not what it was before the Soviet Union, let alone before the Russian conquest. Islamic society has changed beyond recognition. After malaria was eliminated in the Caspian Depression, that area saw a massive influx of highlanders whom the authorities were unable to provide with jobs and housing in the mountains. The Islamic religious centres also moved to the new settlements and towns in the foothills and plains. Society's need for Islamic education declined. By the end of the 20th century, the new generations of Dagestanis were much more secularised than their parents and grandparents who had lived through the Sovietisation of Dagestan had been. In the post-war decades, the former *mekteb*s and *madrasah*s were everywhere replaced with state schools. Russian supplanted Arabic and the Turkic languages as the language of culture, administration and law. Today, Dagestani society is unable either to revert to the Soviet past or to shed its heritage overnight.

Translated from the Russian
by Mischa Gabowitsch

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THE WAHHABITES IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: FEARS AND REALITIES

Vladimir Bobronikov

The Wahhabites in Russia's North Caucasus have been making the headlines in Russia and elsewhere in Europe for over ten years. But who are they: a bugbear or a real threat? While assessments of the movement vary widely, many publications about it are suffused with a feeling close to panic. Let us dot the 'i's by turning to the facts that have come to light so far. First of all, there is no need to demonise the movement. It does represent a threat, but only to individual Muslim areas in post-Soviet Russia, not to the whole world. In fact it is a new internal Muslim schism.

The Wahhabites have turned against their coreligionists and their holy sites, e.g. when they tried to destroy the tomb of the mother of Sheikh Kunta-Hajji in Chechnya. The name 'Wahhabites' refers to the 17th century Arabian reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and is used by their opponents who accuse them of distorting local Islamic traditions. The Wahhabites call themselves the 'community of true Muslims' (*jama'at*) or 'brothers' (*ikhwan*).

The Wahhabites zealously advocate 'purging' Islam of 'illicit innovations' (*bida'*) which they see as due to contacts with infidels in Russia, and reverting to the ways of the 'righteous ancestors' (*as-salaf as-salihun*) from the time of the Prophet, giving rise to another name for the movement, Salafis. They do not consider their traditionalist opponents to be Muslims, calling them 'heathens' (*mushrikun*). They try to set themselves off from them in every way they can, and until the start of persecutions in the 1990s cultivated an external appearance that distinguished them from other North Caucasian Muslims: men wore shortened trousers and a beard, but no moustache. Women covered their faces. Like Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, they are highly critical of saints' cults and of the Sufis who have come out into the open since the fall of the Soviet Union.

But the historical conditions of their emergence, their social basis and the form of their movement are very different from those of the 18th century Arabian Wahhabites. While the latter were influenced by the Hanbali school, the Caucasian Wahhabites of the 20th and 21st centuries reject the very idea of traditional legal schools in Islam.

Some refer to Wahhabism as 'dollar Islam', claiming that foreign missionaries paid the Wahhabite imams (emirs) thousands of dollars for every new convert. The suggestion is that the movement came to the Caucasus from the Arab Middle East. This is not borne out by the facts. The movement emerged in the years of the Iron Curtain in North Dagestani migrant *jama'ats* in the town of Astrakhan. Soviet secularisation had prepared the ground for it by eroding the local religious culture.

In the 1970s, the ideologists of the movement, the Avars Ahmad-Qadi Akhtaev from the village of Kudali (1942–1998), Bagautdin Magomedov (born 1946) and his stepbrother Abas Kebedov from the village of Santlada were working side by side with the their future Sufi enemies, setting up illegal circles (*hujra*) where they taught young people Arabic and the basics of Islam. They parted ways when they began fighting each other for control over the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Dagestan (SBMD), which was taken over by supporters of *Sheikh* Said from Chirkey in 1992. In December 1997 the traditionalists forced Bagautdin to flee to Urus-Martan in Chechnya.

By that time, the Wahhabites were already involved in the armed conflict between Chechnya and Russia. From peacefully preaching ‘pure Islam’ they went over to an armed struggle in defence of the faith *(jihad*), seeing the entire Caucasus as a ‘realm of war’ for their religion (*dar al-harb*). For this purpose, Bagautdin created a party called *Jama’at of Dagestan*. The movement was joined by veterans of the Afghan and Chechen campaigns, including the Saudi Samir ibn Salih as-Suwailem, better known under the pseudonym al-Khattab (1965–2002), and the Chechen terrorist Shamil Basaev (1965–2006).

In May 1998, four Dargin villages in the Buynaksk area of Dagestan declared themselves a *shariah* zone independent of Russia (the ‘Kadar zone’). In the summer of 1999, Basaev’s units carried out a raid into Northern Dagestan but were driven out by Russian troops and a local militia, following which the Kadar zone was taken by storm. A Dagestani law passed in 1999 outlawed all Wahhabite mosques, schools and newspapers. Although the Wahhabites are being persecuted across the Northern Caucasus, the Islamic traditionalists, and with them the Russian authorities, are unable to shed their fears of a Wahhabite comeback. Wahhabite emirs, including Bagautdin Magomedov, al-Khattab and Basaev, have died or emigrated. Bagautdin’s former disciple Ayub (Anguta) Omarov has left the influential and wealthy Wahhabite community of Astrakhan. Nevertheless, the spectre of Wahhabism never leaves the government in peace.

It is seen as the driving force behind the recent clashes between traditionalist and ‘new’ Muslims in the North Caucasus and the series of terrorist attacks that has engulfed the region since 2004. Best known among these are the seizure of a Beslan school in September 2004, the assault of the Yarmuk Jama’at on the Nalchik branch of the Federal Drug Control Service in 2004, and the ongoing shootings of policemen in Dagestan. It is unclear whether any of this can be attributed to Wahhabite influence. What is obvious, however, is that Russia should start looking for peaceful ways out of the Caucasian crisis. To do so, the government must respect Islam, but not side with any of the region’s rival Muslim groups.

Translated from the Russian
by Mischa Gabowitsch